

**House Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security  
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**Background Checks for Aviation Security Screeners**

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Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Sabo and Members of the subcommittee, thank you for inviting us to appear before you today to discuss our role in the recruitment and assessing of airport screeners and specifically how that related to background checks of screener applicants. While we did not perform background checks, some of the information collected during our assessment and screening process was used by those that did.

To provide the proper context, allow me to start at the beginning.

On February 25, 2002, one of the first actions taken by the newly established TSA was to award a contract to NCS Pearson (now Pearson Government Solutions) that included the following services for Airport Screeners and Law Enforcement Officers (LEOs):

- Recruitment
- Assessment
- Selection Support
- Day-To-Day Human Resources Support

The RFP on which the contract was awarded stated that the contractor would help TSA hire 30,000 Passenger Screeners and 5,000 Law Enforcement Officers (LEOs) by the November 19, 2002 deadline. This was to be accomplished using existing Pearson facilities, local police offices and medical testing facilities over a 10-month period.

Soon after contract award and throughout the contract period, TSA increased the scope of work significantly beyond what was specified in the RFP. Ultimately, TSA required Pearson to qualify over 29,000 screeners. By the end of our contract in early January, the results were astounding: over 6 million prospective applicants viewed the Internet-based job postings; 1.7 million job applications were completed and prescreened on-line for screener positions; and an additional 1.2 million applications were received for field management and administrative positions.

Pearson held 89 job fairs in 56 cities drawing 84,000 prospective job seekers, and our 2,200-person call centers handled nearly 3 million calls. At TSA's direction we established over 150 assessment centers in the U.S., Puerto Rico, Guam, Saipan, and the Virgin Islands. We assessed over 328,000 individuals for TSA's screener workforce—permitting TSA to offer employment to over 60,000 individuals and place another 66,219 in the TSA employment “ready pool”. This process generated in excess of 6 million documents that had to be properly secured, organized, and processed according to federal regulations in 4 months. The bulk of the assessment and hiring

effort was completed in a 14-week period as directed by TSA using a very dynamic 'roll-out' schedule.

Pearson's role didn't end with TSA's hiring decision. Collectively, Pearson's Human Resources specialists completed over 70,000 benefit transactions and response center actions per month. For example, Pearson's Data Transaction Center completed up to 13,000 data transactions each week--with a critical data accuracy rate of over 99 percent. This support allowed TSA to bring on-board up to 6,000 new employees per week. In addition, Pearson's HR Employee Response Call Center responded to over 5,000 new employee calls per week and attained a 20-second response time for 80% of the callers.

These astounding results could not have happened without the leadership of Secretary Mineta and Admiral Loy, the day to day interaction of countless TSA employees, the hard work of our subcontractors and vendors, and of course the fierce dedication of the thousands of Pearson employees around the country. Employees from Chicago, Minneapolis, Phoenix, Corbin, Lawrence and many other cities contributed to this effort. Without this absolute dedication by everyone to get the job done, it could not have happened.

So what was the process developed by TSA and Pearson that led to these results and how did that relate to background checks?

## PROCESS

With direction from TSA, we developed a system to quickly and efficiently move applicants through the recruitment process. Potential applicants would complete an online application hosted by our subcontractor, Monster.com, either through the TSA or USA Jobs websites. Once the online application was completed, applicants received instant notification as to whether or not he or she met the basic requirements for consideration, including U.S citizenship, and a certain level of education. If an applicant met the basic requirements, Pearson would contact them to schedule an appointment at an assessment center.

At the assessment center, candidates would undergo a two-phase 15-step assessment process, usually in one day. Applicants were required to complete a SF-85P, which is a multi-page OPM standard form that requests information used for a detailed background investigation. Pearson provided assistance to the applicants in completing the SF-85P.

Phase I included a competency inventory, English fluency assessment and a screener object recognition test. If an applicant successfully completed the Phase I assessments, he or she was interviewed by an HR specialist after which they received a pass/fail rating. If they passed the Phase I assessments, they were verbally offered a job contingent on completing all steps in Phase II, a successful background investigation and medical examination, including drug screening.

Phase II included various medical and baggage lifting tests. PEC, a Pearson subcontractor, would digitally photograph and fingerprint the applicants. Finally, HR specialists would again confirm that applicants had completed the necessary forms including the SF-85P. Our staff reviewed the SF-85P to ensure it was complete and provided assistance to applicants who had questions about completing the form.

Once an applicant successfully completed Phase II and was scheduled for orientation and training, the fingerprints and forms for the preliminary background checks were submitted to the government for review and investigation. The applicant received an official letter from TSA that offered them a job contingent on results of the background checks. The hard copy SF-85P was sent to OPM after the candidate completed orientation.

So, our role with regard to background checks was limited to data collection. We worked with the applicants to ensure that the hard copy SF-85P and other forms were complete, and through our subcontractor, PEC, collected and submitted digital fingerprints. In the case of the SF-85Ps, Pearson assigned a group of trained employees to perform a second check of the completed forms after the applicant left the assessment center, and before the forms were sent to OPM. This check was necessarily limited because Pearson was not given access to databases that would have permitted it to check the accuracy of any statements that an applicant made on a form. After an applicant had been hired and had completed the orientation session, we would match the SF-85P with the OF 306, and submit to OPM. Beyond the data collection process, Pearson had no role in security clearances or adjudication.

The process was not as cut and dried as it may appear on this chart. TSA and its contractors faced many challenges along the way. Certainly questions have been raised about the cost and other issues related to the undertaking of this program. But, remember the TSA effort to hire a new federal security workforce represents the largest peacetime mobilization in our nation's history. There was no model to copy. There was no policy and no standards to fall back on. There was no staff or technical infrastructure in place. All of that was built from scratch which led to frequent changes in contract requirements. In addition, this monumental task was performed in a backdrop of a tight Congressionally mandated deadline of November 19, 2002. And finally this was performed in a post 9/11 warlike environment. So, viewed in this context, the accomplishments of TSA and the contractors are all the more impressive.

That concludes my statement and I am happy to answer your questions.